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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9890
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 012410

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KJUS](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: GOC PARDONS 23 FARC GUERRILLAS

REF: BOGOTA 11207

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) On December 2, the GOC pardoned 23 imprisoned members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Those pardoned were guilty only of membership in an illegal armed group; no guerrillas guilty of violent crimes were eligible for pardon. They will be released from prisons throughout the country on December 3 and have pledged not to return to the armed conflict. They will be eligible to enter the GOC's reinsertion program for former members of an illegal armed group. All had light sentences and would have been released in a short period of time even without the pardon.

¶2. (U) The GOC promised the safety of the pardoned guerrillas and their families from FARC or paramilitary reprisals, and said the release was a demonstration of government commitment to secure the release of hostages. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said efforts would continue to hold a humanitarian exchange with FARC and President Uribe underscored that the release was not a surrender to FARC demands. Family members of FARC hostages, including Ingrid Betancourt's mother and the wife of one of the kidnapped Valle Department deputies, praised the GOC's actions.

¶3. (C) Restrepo explained to the Ambassador that the GOC was responding to heavy pressure from family members of FARC hostages to hold a prisoner exchange. The FARC has rejected all GOC offers, including a recent proposal to swap 15 guerrillas followed by a temporary cease-fire and face-to-face meeting in Bogota (reftel). We understand that another 12 ex-FARC members will be released as soon as the documents are prepared.

¶4. (C) Comment: Although we are dubious that this initiative will prompt any FARC action, it has some interesting aspects: (1) It is very close to the outcome desired for the paramilitary process: release and reinsertion of illegal armed group members after identification, investigation, and verification that they have not committed violent crimes that would demand incarceration; (2) It has received a positive reaction inside and outside Colombia, putting the ball squarely in the FARC's court; and (3) It has reduced pressure for concessions on cases like Simon Trinidad and other high profile FARC members held by the government.

WOOD

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